
Wrestling Observer Newsletter

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The history of Starrcade, for years the biggest event on the Jim Crockett Promotions and later World Championship Wrestling calendar, will be the subject of a WWE DVD release next month.

Starrcade was the first major closed-circuit pro wrestling event in history when it debuted 25 years ago this week, on Thanksgiving night–November 24, 1983, at the Greensboro Coliseum, subtitled, “A Flair for the Gold.” The show, inspired by a show held the previous March, when people came from all over the Carolinas and thousands were turned away as Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood, possibly the most underrated babyface tag team in wrestling history, put up their careers as a team in a final opportunity to win the world tag team titles from Sgt. Slaughter & Don Kernodle. Whenever a gimmick is successful, it gets copied, and the stipulation of a popular team putting up the fact they could never team again has been done numerous times since that night, and it has never worked half as well as it did here. As much as that gimmick was successful, another interesting note on it was the actual blow-off match of the program a few months later, where both Steamboat & Youngblood and Slaughter & Kernodle met for the titles, and in this case, which ever team lost could never team up again (Slaughter & Kernodle lost since Slaughter was about to start with WWF) only drew 6,000 fans. The lesson is that every feud has its peak, and when you go past the peak, even with the most extreme of stipulations, it’s no longer that effective.

The irony was that it was only a few months later, due to Youngblood’s drug problems, Steamboat asked out of the team. In fact, the team’s last memorable match was on the first Starrcade show, against newly formed heels and tag champs Jack & Jerry Brisco. They regained the titles but a month later, the team ceased to exist as Steamboat announced a gimmicked retirement so he could take a few months off and get his gym business off the ground. Youngblood ended up in Florida, worked briefly with Bill Watts, and in 1985, died of a heart attack on a tour of Australia. Youngblood’s death was never acknowledged on Crockett television.

But the main event of the original Starrcade culminated a six month program with Ric Flair’s second NWA title win, beating Harley Race in a cage match, with Gene Kiniski as referee. The other big match was Roddy Piper beating Greg Valentine in a dog collar match that became legendary for its brutality.

The first two Starrcades were held in their entirety at the Greensboro Coliseum, where Thanksgiving wrestling had been a tradition dating back to the 70s, when Crockett Promotions’ biggest drawing show of the year, without a fancy name, would usually be on Thanksgiving night. It was Dusty Rhodes who came up with the name, and Dory Funk who booked the promotion leading up to the show. Ironically, Funk was not there for Starrcade, as he was in Japan for the Real World Tag League tournament. Even though 1983 is now remembered as one of the high points ever for Jim Crockett Promotions with the two most famous matches in company history, in 1984, it was Rhodes booking in the Carolinas, while Funk had moved to book Florida. But it was under Rhodes, in 1986, that the company peaked, drawing about 1.9 million fans that year.

Flair had already had one long run as NWA champion, winning it on September 17, 1981, in Kansas City, from Rhodes, and losing to Race, who had dominated the title from 1977-81, on June 10, 1983, in St. Louis. The title loss allowed them to build for a return. Flair and Race met numerous times in the Carolinas, usually with DQ finishes. Then Race put a \$25,000 bounty on Flair’s head. Bounties were long a part

of Southern wrestling, and I don’t really know why this one is so much more remembered than almost all the others. Perhaps because it involved Flair at the peak of his local drawing power. Flair was the Carolinas first home-grown world champion. None of its other big babyfaces like Johnny Weaver, Blackjack Mulligan, Steamboat or Wahoo McDaniel ever captured the elusive big title, which changed hands so infrequently that it became almost a mythical prize.

Bob Orton and Dick Slater did an injury angle with Flair, and on television, Flair, wearing a neck brace, announced his retirement from wrestling. But he quickly (as in by the end of the one hour television broadcast) returned, swinging a baseball bat while chasing Orton and Slater around the arena in one of the most memorable angles in Crockett promotion history. The match storyline was that Flair said he would retire if he didn’t win the title.

The show itself was a great success as far as a local promotion, but the attempt to do something new, the closed-circuit, was only a so-so success. It was blamed on bad weather, but they did 17 arenas, mostly in the Carolinas, and attendance was spotty, doing about 30,000 people total, which was less than they had expected. Greensboro sold out with 15,447 fans and turned many away. This came more than one year before the first Wrestlemania.

There had been a few attempts at closed-circuit prior to this. The most notable was the 1976 Muhammad Ali vs. Antonio Inoki match from Budokan Hall in Tokyo, double headlined with Andre the Giant vs. Chuck Wepner from Shea Stadium in New York. There were tons of locations throughout North America, similar to what a big Ali boxing match would do in the days before PPV existed. Outside of the Northeast, where the real draw was a Bruno Sammartino vs. Stan Hansen cage match for the WWF title at Shea, the closed-circuit didn’t do well. There were a number of problems, including Inoki not being well-known, wrestling promoters not really getting behind the promotion in a big way outside of Vince McMahon Sr. The boxing fans that followed Ali didn’t support it in a big way, not sure if it would be real or not. The only other attempts at closed circuit were within a city. During the 1970s and into the early 80s, when Madison Square Garden would sellout well in advance, they would open up what was then called the Felt Forum for the overflow. In Los Angeles in 1971, during a big year, particularly when John Tolos was Americas’ champion, they were selling out the Olympic Auditorium (which would be announced at 11,000 but was really just under 10,000) so quickly that they would rent two major movie theaters in Los Angeles for a closed-circuit broadcast. They were successful at it for a while, but as wrestling’s popularity went down in the market, there was no need for it.

The first Starrcade was successful enough that it became Crockett’s Thanksgiving tradition and through 1987, remained a closed circuit event at all the major arenas in the territory. With Rhodes as booker in 1984, they did the second, a somewhat forgettable show where Flair beat Rhodes via blood stoppage in 12:00 with boxing legend Joe Frazier as referee making the call. Rhodes cut a promo on Frazier, how in boxing they may stop a match like that but in wrestling you don’t do that. The idea was to build for a Rhodes vs. Frazier match that ended up never taking place. The match also featured one of the best Starrcade matches ever, a largely forgotten Steamboat vs. Tully Blanchard match.

In 1985, Starrcade was another modern first, with a card emanating from two locations, both Greensboro and the Omni in Atlanta, known

as "Starrcade 85: The Gathering." It was similar to the Ali-Inoki dual main events from Tokyo and New York (as well as most places in the country got a third location featuring wrestlers better known in their area; here, for example, we actually got a unique show where we saw matches live from Chicago including Verne Gagne vs. Nick Bockwinkel and Bruiser & Crusher vs. Blackjack Lanza & Bobby Duncum, then got Andre vs. Wepner from Shea, Ali vs. Inoki from Tokyo, and finished the night with a few matches from the Cow Palace in San Francisco). In 1986, McMahon copied the formula with Wrestlemania coming from Chicago, Los Angeles and the Nassau Coliseum, but there were problems with that show and since that time, Wrestlemania has been from one location.

The lay of the land at the time was that in 1985, Crockett purchased the TBS television contract from Vince McMahon for \$1 million, just as Ted Turner was about to kick McMahon off the station for failing to tape live shows in Atlanta as Turner wanted, as McMahon just sent in tapes from the road. Ratings had declined and as an embarrassment, Turner put Bill Watts' Mid South Wrestling on the air in early 1985 outside the traditional wrestling time slot, and immediately the Watts shows drew better ratings than the McMahon shows. In fact, Turner had a verbal deal with Watts, where they would go in as partners and Turner would help fund a national expansion that Watts felt was necessary because he saw the days of regional wrestling being viable coming to an end. But when Crockett made the deal, Turner lost interest in doing business with Watts, and Crockett also, with the key Atlanta television, took over the Georgia market that Ole Anderson had been running, which had not been doing well due to a weak television time slot and a lower quality of talent than fans had been used to. That deal also spelled the end of Gordon Solie as the voice of TBS wrestling, as Crockett, in what was a controversial move at the time, decided to go with Tony Schiavone. As it turned out, it was only three years later by the time Watts had lost so much trying to finance his own expansion due to high costs of television and an inability to draw as the No. 3 national promotion; and then Crockett, who had also purchased the dying Florida, St. Louis and Central States offices, also went down. With bankruptcy looming, Turner Broadcasting somewhat reluctantly purchased a majority interest in Crockett Promotions for \$9 million in 1988 (they later bought out the remaining Crockett stock) largely because they wanted the wrestling programming which had been a tradition on the station since 1972 locally, and since 1976 nationally when the station went up on satellite.

Like Greensboro, Atlanta had a huge wrestling tradition dating back to the 70s. The city had an annual Thanksgiving celebration so people were already out, and most years, that was the biggest crowd of the year for the promotion. At one point they had an annual Thanksgiving tag team tournament where they brought in some of the biggest names in the country to go along with the area regulars. In 1985 and 1986, rather than give up the lucrative Atlanta Thanksgiving tradition, they ran in both cities, and saved the main event for Atlanta. The fans in Greensboro were fine with sharing the event, selling out both years.

In 1985, it was even more than that as Watts promoted Starrcade at the Superdome in New Orleans, running the feed from Greensboro and Atlanta, and adding a few matches from his own promotion, instead of doing what had been the Superdome Thanksgiving tradition.

Having attended the 1986 version in Greensboro, the one thing that was clear is that at least in that city, it didn't matter which was in the arena and which was on the big screens, as they reacted just as big to the taped matches. The show ran four-and-a-half hours, ending at 12:35 a.m., and on a night like that, nobody left early nor did the crowd burn out before the main event. To the people in Greensboro, it was every big or bigger than if they got Wrestlemania. However, in New Orleans, people were mad that most of the matches weren't taking place live.

Starrcade, largely due to the original show, had become in a few short years a cultural tradition in Greensboro, akin to the Kentucky Derby in Louisville or the Indianapolis 500, although obviously more or an underground unpublicized version since wrestling in those days got no mainstream press. Atlanta didn't sellout, but came close both years, and with jacked up ticket prices, in 1986, the two shows did a combined \$660,000, an incredible figure for that period. In 1987, with Crockett attempting to promote nationally, the idea was they had to establish that their company was not a Southern regional territory. The decision was made to run the show in Chicago, where, largely due to the popularity of the Road Warriors, they were selling out the 9,000-seat UIC Pavilion every time out. The 1987 show was a disaster in many ways, and was probably the show that set the stage for the death of the promotion, and to this day, most in that part of the country consider that "real" pro wrestling died the next year.

It would be the first non-WWF show on national PPV, and Vince McMahon didn't want competition, so fired a pre-emptive strike. He created Survivor Series for the same night. With McMahon coming off Wrestlemania III, a spectacular PPV success, he had the juice with the cable companies. At first, the cable industry was thrilled. Crockett agreed to move Starrcade to the afternoon, so the shows wouldn't go head-to-head. Thanksgiving night had been great for business because the idea was people spent the day with their families and then would go out as a group that night. Thanksgiving day was when families were at home eating turkey and it was very questionable about drawing for an afternoon show. But since the money was to be made on PPV, Crockett felt the dynamic was different. People would have their whole families together and buying a PPV, or two in the same day, if they were a family that liked wrestling made sense.

It turned out to be irrelevant. Just as cable companies started talking about offering package deals for both shows, which probably would have benefitted Crockett, McMahon, who booked the show largely to kill Crockett's debut on PPV, refused to go along with it. He said that cable companies that picked up his show couldn't even air the Crockett show. Even worse, he said that any company that picked up the Crockett show also wouldn't be able to air Wrestlemania, which was a tremendous windfall the year before (as it turned out, no PPV company was denied Wrestlemania, including the ones who did air the Crockett show). PPV was in its infancy. McMahon was a proven commodity and Crockett had no track record. While he drew well in many markets and had solid television ratings (although by this point they were far off their peak, but they still did 4.0s in the summer of 1987 on TBS from 6:05 to 8:05 p.m. on Saturday nights and were one of the highest rated shows on cable), in all the media stories on wrestling, it was all about McMahon, based in New York and strong in Los Angeles. It was as if Crockett, based in Charlotte, didn't exist, which actually was one of the reasons for running the show in Chicago.

Crockett was largely iced out. The money he expected to make, to pay the high dollar guaranteed contracts he'd signed his top guys to, never materialized. Crockett Promotions ended up going broke and most of the wrestlers never got what they signed for.

While it's generally forgotten that Crockett did book the Greensboro Coliseum on that day, airing the card from Chicago and using some prelim guys in the territory for a couple of live shows, it was not a success, drawing 5,500 people, and the tradition was killed, as it was in Atlanta.

Ric Flair always claimed that was the beginning of the end of the Carolinas, and in particular, Greensboro, its best drawing city, because they had Starrcade taken away from them. That's probably simplistic in the sense that how things played out as far as the decline of the Carolinas house show business had a lot of reasons, between constant badly booked finishes, no revolving of talent and Rhodes, by 1987, was burned out as booker after using most of his good ideas in

1985 and 1986. There were good crowds in Greensboro after Starrcade, although as a general rule, business on average was down from that date. It absolutely was one of the reasons, and at the time, most people thought the move was a bad idea going in, and in hindsight, were even more sure.

Interesting that Chicago, the hottest city for the promotion outside the original territory, did sellout well in advance for the show even with the awkward start time. But due to the finish of the Road Warriors vs. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson match, where the Road Warriors, the biggest draws in Chicago at the time, apparently won the world tag team titles to a deafening pop, only to have it reversed, it was the wrong finish on the wrong night and Chicago was never the same for the promotion.

Known at the time as "The Dusty Finish," the ending of that match had been around since the 60s, if not earlier, and was actually a great finish when done on rare occasion. It was a classic for world title matches where fans would visually see the local babyface challenger actually pin the world champion, who would escape based on a fluke. Historically, business would be up months later when the match would be rematched in the same city.

But Rhodes did it so often it became predictable and it was actually a big part of the killing of the Carolinas, as well as St. Louis. At one point in Greensboro, he booked that finish on more than half the cards during a calendar year. It was the same thing in most of the markets they ran, since they largely did the same finishes every night. After the fifth or sixth time in a year when they did that finish, I was at a show in Greensboro and it was the wrong kind of heat. Yet they continued to misread it, thinking the huge pop for the babyface winning, and then it being taken away would get people to come back to see the rematch as that finish, when done on rare occasions, had proven to do. But crowds kept falling.

Actually, it will be very interesting to see how Starrcade 87 is presented in the DVD, both if they admit Survivor Series was created largely to kill Crockett's TV debut, the move from Greensboro/Atlanta to Chicago, and the affect of the finish of the Road Warriors match on Chicago and the affect of pulling the show on Greensboro. That day was, in hindsight one of the most important days in wrestling history, but to acknowledge why and how it was on a WWE DVD would be tricky.

The idea of going through the history of Starrcade, which started as a Thanksgiving night tradition in the 80s and later became a fixture as the year-ending major show the weekend after Christmas is something we'll do early next year after the DVD is released. WWE usually does a good job in producing the DVDs, but at the same time, the history is often skewed, some because it's written by a company that it was warring with the entire time, and some, simply due to people's memories not always being the best. WWE had on-line voting for the 25 greatest matches in Starrcade history and we'll go down that listing here with some thoughts.

1. Ric Flair vs. Vader (1993): I expected this to be No. 1 for a number of reasons. First, it involved Flair and the voting was this year, and Flair is more associated with Starrcade than any other wrestler. The Harley Race match was too early for most voters, as were the Dusty matches. Plus, the number of people who actually saw the matches in their context before 1988 wasn't that large because there was no national PPV in those years, and it was only regional closed-circuit. The match was never supposed to happen. The plan for Starrcade was for Sid Vicious to beat Vader for the championship, which was a very unpopular decision at the time. Vicious was one of those guys who everyone thought had potential because of his look, but had never drawn on top in WCW. Then again, nothing in WCW was working at the time, as their house shows averaged less than 1,000 paid per

event that year. Vicious and Arn Anderson got into a brutal fight in a hotel in England, after both had too much to drink. Vicious started the fight, which got nasty and involved Vicious stabbing Anderson numerous times with the scissors Anderson used to trim his beard, which were scissors Anderson introduced into the conflict after Vicious hit Anderson with a cheap shot with a chair as he opened his hotel room door. Both men had been sent to their rooms after nearly getting into a fight in the bar where Vicious was bragging about his own stardom and running down Flair. Since the show was in Charlotte, the company decided to put in Flair as a babyface, have him say that if he didn't win the title from Vader, he would retire. They did a great build-up throughout the show, showing Flair and his family getting ready, driving to the arena, showed clips of Flair from childhood and through his career and Flair ended up pinning Vader to win the title. And he turned back heel soon enough to feud with Hulk Hogan, who was signed a few months later. The match was very good, but hardly close to the best match in Starrcade history, but it was a strong presentation and build on a show during an otherwise forgettable year for the promotion. To show how bad the promotion was, this was the biggest drawing match of the year for the company, with 5,500 paid and a \$62,000 house.

2. Magnum T.A. vs. Tully Blanchard (1985) - What is impressive about this match being No. 2 is that it took place 23 years ago, and neither man has been a part of the major league scene in around 15 years. It was match people talked about for years since fans years later would get on Blanchard's case by chanting, "I Quit" at him. The Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk and Rock vs. Mick Foley I Quit matches may have ended up more famous, the former because it set a record TV audience and the latter because it was immortalized in the movie "Beyond the Mat." This was hardly the first I Quit match, but it was the first one famous on a national basis.

3. Ric Flair vs. Harley Race (1983) - This was the main event on the first show. This match has an interesting back story to it. Both because it was on the first Starrcade and because it had such a great build-up, many would consider this the single most famous match ever held in the Carolinas (the two matches usually mentioned are this one and the match held earlier that year with Sgt. Slaughter & Don Kernodle vs. Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood). It was in a cage, which was controversial at the time because there had never been a major world title change in a cage match. Gene Kiniski was referee. The funny thing about it being voted as the greatest match, is that it was great on that night because it was a monumental undertaking as the first true supercard of that caliber aside from Ali- Inoki, which was a flop. But of all the Flair-Race matches I've ever seen, it was probably the worst one of them. The other interesting back story involved Race. Wrestling was about to change with Vince McMahon going national. Just a few days before the match, McMahon and Race had a secret meeting and McMahon offered Race a huge amount of money to jump ship without dropping the title. It was McMahon's idea for a big move, to have Race show up as world champion and do a unification match with Hulk Hogan as a way to kill the NWA title, which the majority of territories had built to its fan base as the only real world title. Race turned down the offer, partially because he had so much of his own money tied up in the Kansas City and St. Louis promotions, and also, he said, because he would have a difficult time looking in the mirror if he no-showed the event. Few remember, but this match was not promoted outside of the Carolinas as Atlanta had its own show that night, as did most of the major promotions.

4. Sting vs. Hulk Hogan (1997) - This was in many ways the climactic match of the WCW heyday. While 1998 ended up being a better year than 1997, this was the key match of the Nitro era. It was a one year build-up with Sting never wrestling, just showing up with his white face paint and doing run-ins at the end of the show. Hogan, as the heel world champion, was running roughshod. The match did in excess of 600,000 PPV buys (Wrestlemania that year did 237,000 buys and even

the famed Survivor Series with the second most famous wrestling match of all-time less than two months earlier only did 250,000 buys), setting the all-time record for the industry. It also did a company record for the time with 16,052 paid, setting company records with a \$543,000 gate and \$161,961 in merchandise revenue. WWF broke the PPV record a few months later with the Mike Tyson Wrestlemania). But it was almost universally considered a terrible show. The match itself wasn't good. Sting was rusty from a year where he barely wrestled. Bret Hart, right off Survivor Series, was to debut. This is actually a funny story given that Eric Bischoff likes to pretend he never spoke with me, but a few weeks before the match, he called me because he was so excited about the finish (I think I'd already heard it a few days earlier) where the referee would fast count Sting, but then Bret Hart would show up in his debut, somehow get the match restarted and Sting would win. You have to remember that at that moment, Hart was the hottest wrestler in the business coming off the Survivor Series match. Honestly, that was one of those ideas that sounded tremendous, but in execution, was a disaster. Nick Patrick didn't give Sting a fast count. There have been all sorts of allegations, usually leading to Hogan, about why he gave a normal count. He himself always tried to claim it was a fast count. The three count left the crowd flat. But when Hart restarted it, people were flatter than they should have been because it wasn't a fast count. The crowd popped for Sting winning, but it was very anti-climactic after the year of build, and Sting, who was so hot going into this match, cooled off greatly after. If this match had been anything but a disaster, it probably would have finished first on the list.

5. Road Warriors vs. Midnight Express (1986) - The 1986 Starrcade was the last of the great original shows, and the biggest event non-WWF event in North American pro wrestling up to that point in time. This was billed as "The Night of the Skywalkers," built around the scaffold match. Scaffold matches probably originated in the Tennessee territory. Legend has it the first scaffold match was in 1971 between Jerry Jarrett and Don Greene (although it actually dated back to a match in 1957). In 1983, Bill Dundee and Koko Ware did a scaffold match in the Memphis territory, which led to a 1984 match between the Midnight Express and Rock & Roll Express series in Mid-South Wrestling, including a Thanksgiving night match at the Superdome. In actuality, that Superdome show only drew 7,500 fans, which in that era, was a bomb, even with a strong television build-up. Nevertheless, it was used as the blow-off of a Midnight Express vs. Road Warriors feud. About a month earlier, Road Warrior Hawk had suffered a broken leg in a tag match in Japan, although that injury was kept secret because it would hurt the team's indestructible image. Nobody knew what to expect. Greensboro actually sold out both the Coliseum and closed circuit in a smaller Annex building next door with 19,000 fans total and did \$380,000 even though they got the weaker card, while the Omni did 14,000 fans, about 2,000 shy of capacity. Inherently, scaffold matches suck and once you've seen one, you don't ever need to see another. However, with the job Bobby Eaton and Dennis Condrey did in teasing the fall, it was actually a very dramatic match, that while short, when it was over, nobody was complaining the match didn't live up to its build. After both members of the Midnight Express took the fall, Jim Cornette was chased up the scaffold. Cornette did the math before. Ray Traylor, known as Big Bubba Rogers, was supposed to catch Cornette as he fell off. Cornette figured that hanging off a 15 foot scaffold he'd be eight feet off the ground. Traylor was nearly six-and-a-half feet fall. So on paper, it didn't sound to be that big of a risk. Somehow, the math didn't work, and Cornette fell to the ground fast with Traylor unable to catch him, blowing out his knee, needing surgery, and starting knee problems that would plague him for the rest of his career.

6. Roddy Piper vs. Greg Valentine (1983) - This was the bloody dog collar match that was supposed to actually continue the feud between the two, started off in an angle where Valentine supposedly cost Piper some of the hearing in one of his ears (Piper actually was touring All

Japan Pro Wrestling during his time away from the Carolinas). Piper won the bout, but ended up leaving the promotion a month later after getting a big offer from Vince McMahon. Valentine also left and it was interesting that on a Piper's Pit, the two did a no-no, as they acknowledged the feud on WWF television.

7. Sting vs. Ric Flair (1989) - This was the final match of what was billed as an Iron Man tournament with the company's big four singles stars, Flair, the champion, Sting, the top contender, Lex Luger, the top heel and Great Muta, who had been billed as unbeaten for the entire year in the promotion. It came down to Sting pinning Flair in the final in what at the time was a battle of the company's two top babyfaces. The politics at the time were that WCW did not draw well in 1989, aside from a feud with Flair vs. Terry Funk. The higher-ups put the blame on Flair, who had arguably the best in-ring year of his career, but at 40, was felt to be washed up as a draw and the company needed Sting and Lex Luger on top to turn the corner. Flair had by this point agreed to drop the title to Sting at the next PPV show, and this was step one in that direction, with Sting winning the tournament and beating Flair in the non-title match. Sting ended up blowing out his knee before the February title change, which ended up being delayed until July. As it turned out, Sting drew worse than Flair as champion. While the 1988 Starrcade in Norfolk drew a little shy of sellout, the first time Starrcade hadn't sold out, this Iron Man and Iron Team concept only drew 5,200 paid and \$70,000 to the Omni, considered a disaster at the time. The next legitimate sellout for a Starrcade was in 1996.

8. Shannon Moore & Shane Helms vs. Jung Dragons (Kaz Hayashi & James Yun aka Jimmy Yang) vs. Jamie Noble (as it was spelled at the time) & Evan Karagias in a ladder match (2000) - This match making the list shocks me, not because it wasn't a good match, as it was. It was not one of the best matches ever at a Starrcade, but it was a **** match. This was the opener of the last ever Starrcade, on December 17, 2000. As bad as things were in 1993, this show drew 3,465 paid at the MCI Center (now Verizon Center) in Washington, DC. The live crowd was chanting "boring" one minute in. The gimmick was that whomever won would get a cruiserweight title shot the next night on Nitro. Yep, a Starrcade match to build for a title match on television. But it had all kinds of innovative spots and bumps and six guys who weren't getting a push did steal the show. Of all the matches on this top ten, I could tell you the finish and what it meant immediately. This, the most recent, I had to look up who won. Helms and Moore climbed the ladder and won simultaneously. This match wasn't even put over on television the next night as being anything special. It set up Helms vs. Moore on Nitro, which Helms won, and then they announced Chavo Guerrero vs. Helms would take place on the next PPV.

9. Road Warriors vs. Steiner Brothers (1989) - This was from the same show as the Flair vs. Sting match. These were the two babyface teams that had never met. The idea of the tournament was that the Steiners would beat the Road Warriors during the tournament, that also included Butch Reed & Ron Simmons as Doom and Samu & The Samoan Savage (also known as Tonga Kid, the brother of Rikishi) as the Samoan Swat Team. The SST beat Steiners via DQ, so when the Road Warriors beat the SST, they came back to win the tournament. The match was good, but in reality only went 7:27 and was rated *** at the time, and on that night was only considered the fourth best match on the show. The reason it was remembered is that the Steiners won, the first time the Road Warriors lost via pinfall on a PPV although it was a fluke double pinfall type finish as Scott and Animal both had their shoulders down but Scott raised his shoulder at two to win.

10. Eddie Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko (1997) - This got voted in more based on the Guerrero name, and the fact Guerrero and Malenko had many memorable matches. This wasn't one of them. Technically it was good but the match lacked heat, Malenko, the face at the time, never had a sustained comeback and Guerrero did a frog splash to the knees for the pin in 14:57 as Guerrero won the cruiserweight title. The prior

night on WCW Saturday Night, Guerrero had a much better match with Rey Misterio Jr., while Malenko had a better match with La Parka. The rest of the top 25: Flair vs. Dusty Rhodes (1985 main event, very good match which set up a huge money run of rematches, a Dusty finish where fans went home thinking Rhodes had won the title, only to find it overruled on television); Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood winning the NWA tag title from Jack & Jerry Brisco (1983, very good match), Sting vs. Vader (1992, very good match), Rhodes & Sting vs. Road Warriors (1988), Eddie Guerrero vs. Shinjiro Otani (1995 - an excellent match, nobody knew Otani going in but by the end he was super over), Flair vs. Lex Luger (1988 - better than any top ten match except possibly Magnum vs. Blanchard), Rock & Roll Express vs. Midnight Express (1987 - another scaffold match, technically better than the first one but not as well remembered), Jushin Liger vs. Rey Misterio Jr. (1996 - very good match), Road Warriors vs. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson (1987 - good actual match but a city killing finish), Dustin Rhodes vs. Steve Austin (1993), Battle Bowl Battle Royal (1991), Bill Goldberg vs. Kevin Nash (1998 - beginning of the end for WCW, actually I would have thought this would make top ten as given who was in it the match wasn't bad, it was the end of the Goldberg win streak after Scott Hall shocked Goldberg with a cattle prod, so it was memorable, and it was the main event on the second most watched Starrcade ever), Barry Windham & Brian Pillman vs. Ricky Steamboat & Shane Douglas (1992), Sting vs. Great Muta (1989) and Roddy Piper vs. Hulk Hogan (1996, which was the first Starrcade sellout since 1987).

A long time ago....In a galaxy far far, well, not that far away....

"Starrcade 83, don't miss your chance to be part of the sports event of a lifetime. See Rowdy Roddy Piper vs. Greg Valentine, first time ever in a collar match. A Flare for the Gold, Ric Flair vs. Harley Race for the world heavyweight championship and Jack & Jerry Brisco vs. Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood for the world tag team title. Starrcade 83, Greensboro Coliseum, a Flare for the Gold, don't you miss it."

Tony Schiavone: "Fans, 9 super spectacular matches that night. You'll see Maniac Mark Lewin & Kevin Sullivan vs. Johnny Weaver & Scott McGhee, The Assassins 1 & 2 with Paul Jones against Buggy McGraw & Rufus R. Jones, another big tag team match, Dick Slater & Bob Orton Jr vs. Chief Wahoo McDaniel & Mark Youngblood. You'll also see Abdullah the Butcher there, against Carlos Colon. TV title against the mask, Kabuki with Gary Hart against Charlie Brown from Outta Town. The World tag team title is at stake, Jack & Jerry Brisco taking on Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood w/2 special stipulations we will talk about in just a minute (the title can change hands via DQ and Angelo "King Kong" Mosca as special referee). The collar match you want to see, Rowdy Roddy Piper vs. Greg Valentine. And in the cage, no disqualification, for the world heavyweight championship, former champion Ric Flair taking on Harley Race."

Ric Flair: "Alright Harley, it's come down to this, brother. You and I in the cage. Two men walk in, you the world heavyweight champion, me wanting it. The people in this part of the country have never seen the world championship change hands. Thanksgiving night, they're going to see it. Believe it, Whooh!"

A lot of people, when thinking about when Thanksgiving was the biggest night of the year in wrestling, think about Starrcade 83. In many ways, it was the show that launched the modern era of pro wrestling, some 16 months before the first WrestleMania. The event was held not only live at the Greensboro Coliseum, but closed-circuited to 17 locations around the Carolinas as well as into Puerto Rico.

The actual debut of pro wrestling on closed circuit television was in 1971, shortly after John Tolos threw Monsel's powder in the eyes of Freddie Blassie on KCOP-television's live Saturday night wrestling show from Hollywood, CA. But that era, when the promotion was on

fire in 1971 and 1972, was limited to broadcasting some shows that they knew the Olympic Auditorium couldn't hold to two or three large movie theaters in the city.

Closed circuit wrestling had been done similarly by the mid-70s in Madison Square Garden during Bruno Sammartino's second title reign, where when the Garden would sell out well in advance, they would book what was then called the Felt Forum, a 4,000-seat arena that was part of the MSG complex, to get the overflow.

In 1976, there was actually an event much bigger than Starrcade, the Muhammad Ali vs. Antonio Inoki fight, which was on closed circuit throughout North America. The wrestling promoters booked the show and in hundreds of closed-circuit locations around the country. The idea was to combine the boxing audience with its biggest draw, and the wrestling audience by using Andre the Giant (against boxer Chuck Wepner) and closed circuit of top stars in the area. There were a number of live events, in cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Atlanta, Chicago and Shea Stadium in New York to air the area's biggest wrestling stars for the undercard that night.

But outside of the Northeast, where the real draw was Sammartino coming back from a broken neck against Stan Hansen and drawing 32,000 fans, and not Ali vs. Inoki, the event was a major financial disappointment.

This was something different, as there was no Ali involved, which meant no mainstream publicity. This was a regional wrestling company booking most of its regular major arenas for a closed-circuit showing of the biggest event it ever produced. The event is still probably the single most memorable and talked about wrestling show ever held in that part of the country. Closed-circuit was hit-and-miss, with the promotion blaming terrible weather, but there were still an additional 30,000 fans watching besides the 15,447 which sold out the Greensboro Coliseum in advance. Flair won the title for a second time, beating Race in a match with Gene Kiniski as referee. Flair vs. Race is generally considered one of the two best memorable wrestling matches in the history of Carolinas wrestling. The other, held eight months earlier in the same arena, was Steamboat & Youngblood vs. Sgt. Slaughter & Don Kernodle in Greensboro. That match was actually responsible for Starrcade. That even sold out the Coliseum, turned away 6,000 at the door (which has been exaggerated as the years have gone by), and was responsible for one of the cities most famous traffic jams, with fans coming from all over the territory for the match. Between the traffic jam and turning so many people away, this led to idea of the first Starrcade. Instead of having their fans who wanted to see what they were promoting as a once-in-a-lifetime event have to drive into town, they would beam the show into their home arenas.

Every major match had a storyline, but the key was that Flair had become the area's biggest star in the 70s, and on September 17, 1981, became the first wrestler based in the Carolinas to win the NWA world heavyweight title, when he beat Dusty Rhodes in Kansas City. However, on June 10, 1983, in St. Louis, Race regained the title. There was politicking over who would beat Race for the title, which mostly came down to Flair and David Von Erich. At the time Flair was clearly the stronger candidate, and they ran a series of angles for months. Race came into the territory in July for defenses against Flair in most of the major cities, and after disputed finishes, announced he would never defend against Flair again. He then put up a \$25,000 bounty to anyone who would injure Flair and put him out of action. Dick Slater and Bob Orton Jr. gave Flair a stuff piledriver, putting him out of action. Flair even did a retirement speech with a neck brace in one of the most memorable interviews of his career, only to come back chasing Slater and Orton Jr. around with a baseball bat, and then working around the territory in grudge matches beating both men. Race agreed to one last title shot, with no DQ, in a cage.

An interesting note regarding that show. Dusty Rhodes, who was at the show, but didn't wrestle, and was soon to take over as booker of the territory, came up with the actual name "Starrcade." Gordon Solie, the Florida and Georgia announcer, who did not broadcast in the territory, was flown in to be the lead announcer even though he wasn't fully familiar with all the wrestlers and their angles. And forgotten in history, is that the head booker of the territory, who set up all the angles, was

not even there for the event, as Dory Funk Jr. was in Japan for the annual All Japan Real World Tag League tournament.

The show was nearly ruined. A far bigger story than Starrcade and the first closed circuit event was going on in pro wrestling. Vince McMahon Jr., Vince McMahon Sr., and Jim Barnett (their Director of Operations at the time) all resigned from the NWA at its 1983 convention, as a prelude to the WWF's national expansion. They were attempting to sign every big star with the strategy that they take the top draws in the local areas, and buy the television time slots in the existing areas, and then run in those areas using the local stars and a crew of national stars. It didn't work out exactly like that everywhere, as many wrestlers liked who they worked for, including Flair, but that was the idea. McMahon Jr. had a secret meeting with Race right before Thanksgiving, offering him a big guarantee to bring what most fans believed to be the legitimate world heavyweight title to WWF, where no doubt he'd drop it in a unification match with Hulk Hogan, who McMahon had just signed to be his flag bearer and was about to make champion.

Race, who was part owner in a money losing regional promotion in Kansas City, as well as a traditionally strong St. Louis promotion that had just started a decline, turned it down out of loyalties to the companies he owned, his partners, and the people who trusted him for so many years to hold the championship. Race claimed he told McMahon, while in a bathroom where the secret discussion was taking place, to look in the mirror. McMahon didn't understand where he was going, but Race said that every day when he wakes up, the first thing he has to do is look in the mirror. And if he signed that deal, he'd have no respect for the reflection for the rest of his life. One version of the story Race used to tell, but now when asked changes the subject (as noted by Race's high placing in the recent WWE DVD) is that McMahon was so furious, as they were walking out of the bathroom with the deal dead, McMahon charged and tried to tackle Race, who quickly reversed and subdued him. Whether true or not, the story, minus the physical aspect, was identical to the story Howard Cosell, the legendary sportscaster told, when he was approached by McMahon to be his lead announcer at that same time, and Cosell gave it no consideration and turned down McMahon, noting McMahon snapped and laid into him verbally like he couldn't believe.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 24, 1983

Greensboro Coliseum - Starrcade '83 A Flare for the Gold

Rufus R. Jones & Bugsy McGraw b The Assassins (Jody Hamilton & Ray "Hercules Hernandez" Fernandez)

Kevin Sullivan & Mark Lewin b Johnny Weaver & Scott McGhee

Abdullah the Butcher b Carlos Colon

Dick Slater & Bob Orton Jr. b Wahoo McDaniel & Mark Youngblood

Charlie Brown (Jimmy Valiant) b Great Kabuki to win the NWA TV title and retain his mask

Roddy Piper b Greg Valentine in a dog collar match

Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood b Jack & Jerry Brisco to win the NWA world tag team titles with Angelo Mosca as referee

Ric Flair b Harley Race to win the NWA title in a cage match with Gene Kiniski as referee

Attendance: 15,447 sellout

Closed-circuit attendance: 30,000

Thanksgiving in most of the 80s meant some of the biggest wrestling shows of the year. The tradition was at its peak from 1983 to 1987, with the early Starrcades in Greensboro and later Atlanta as well, Star Wars at Reunion Arena in Dallas, the AWA at the St. Paul Civic Center, Mid South Wrestling at the Superdome in Louisiana and the early Survivor Series events. But it's been largely extinct for almost two decades.

The mentality espoused by the wrestling promoters who had success that night was that families would get together in the afternoon and by evening, wanted to go out and do something. The movie business had its traditional best weekend of the year, that showed that at night, people wanted to go out, often with their families. That meant bigger crowds. It was not just Thanksgiving night, but the Thursday through Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend that, along with Dec. 25-30, became the two best periods of the year for the industry. But those holiday traditions are now long gone, and few modern fans even think of wrestling on Thanksgiving, Christmas or any other holiday.

It's hard to know exactly what started the tradition, but it was not something that was part of wrestling as long as people can remember. In the 1950s, Thanksgiving was avoided for major shows, thinking you couldn't draw well on that holiday. Except in Greensboro, it really wasn't until the 70s that there was really evidence of Thanksgiving being a great date to draw people to shows. Sure, some regular Thursday night cities, like Sacramento, drew well above average, running normal shows, but Greensboro (and later Norfolk as well) for Jim Crockett Sr. would try and build that date for its big show of the year, and by the late 60s, had created a tradition.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 23, 1972

Sacramento Memorial Auditorium

Manuel Cruz (Jose Gonzalez) b Beauregarde

The Samoans (Reno Tuufuli & Tio Taylor) b Fritz Von Goering & John L. Sullivan (later to become Johnny Valiant)

Crazy Luke Graham d Pepper Gomez

Great Mephisto b Pepper Martin (later to become a movie actor)

Paul DeMarco & Lars Anderson b Pat Patterson & Rocky Johnson via DQ in a three out of five fall match to retain NWA world tag team championships

Attendance: 4,200 sellout

The earliest record we can find of a major Thanksgiving event was November 26, 1959, when Barnett promoted a show at the Indianapolis State Fairgrounds Coliseum headlined by Roy & Ray Shire (Ray Stevens) defending the NWA world tag team titles against Dick the Bruiser & Yukon Eric, and drawing a sellout of 13,000 fans. This was when the Shire Brothers were on fire as world tag champs and they drew three crowds of that size in a five week period against Bruiser and partners, so it wasn't as if it established Thanksgiving as a special day to draw.

But the two cities where Thanksgiving wrestling was the longest lasting tradition started over the next two years.

Minneapolis-St. Paul had a Thanksgiving tradition from 1960 to 1987, until the AWA could no longer draw decently. The only exception was

in 1972, when the promotion ran Saturday night of Thanksgiving weekend.

And it's little known trivia that the first pro wrestling event ever held at the Greensboro Coliseum was on November 23, 1961, Thanksgiving night, and wrestling was held in the arena on Thanksgiving through 1987. Unlike Minneapolis, where Thanksgiving was not really pushed as anything bigger than a usual show, it was Greensboro that had the biggest cultural Thanksgiving wrestling tradition of any city in the country.

A 1984 newspaper story in the local paper noted, "In Greensboro, Thanksgiving has become synonymous with the spectacle of big men hurling each other about in a small ring in front of thousands. Wrestling has become part of Thanksgiving in this city for more than a quarter of a century."

The newspaper story for that debut talked more about the main event than the beginning of pro wrestling in what would be one of its most successful arenas, or the idea of a show on Thanksgiving night.

"Big Bob Orton (grandfather of Randy Orton), rough and rugged part-Indian from Kansas City, will provide the championship tests for world-famed Argentina Rocca in the feature wrestling event at the Greensboro Coliseum Thanksgiving night at 8:15. These two giants of the wrestling world met at New York's Madison Square Garden a month ago in the feature (sort of true, the MSG main event in October of that year was Rocca & Miguel Perez vs. Orton & Buddy Rogers), and they will be renewing their 1961 competitive series in the Coliseum's first wrestling performance which is expected to draw a near-capacity crowd."

The Coliseum held live wrestling every Thanksgiving night through 1986, drawing many of the largest crowds in the history of the territory. Ric Flair even points to the decision of moving Starrcade out of Greensboro, to Chicago, in 1987 as the key moment that killed the Carolinas territory. While that is a little simplistic, there was a lot of bad will among the fans in Greensboro when they took Starrcade away from them. Pretty much at the time, everyone thought it was a bad move. With the benefit of hindsight, it was still a bad move, but not one that changed history any.

Still, Thanksgiving 1987 was among the most pivotal days in the history of the industry, and played a big part in the death of Jim Crockett Promotions. Although that was probably inevitable as well, as Jim Crockett Jr. simply didn't have the money, the developed revenue streams and cash flow to compete on an even playing field with Vince McMahon. He expanded into new markets second, wasn't as good at making stars, didn't have as much money to spend on production and was facing insurmountable odds by not being from New York.

Crockett announced his company would do its first PPV event, the fifth Starrcade event, on November 26, 1987, called "Chitown Heat," at the UIC Pavilion in Chicago. At the time, Crockett was desperately trying to combat the perception that his company was a Southern wrestling promotion strong in the Carolinas, and thus, secondary to Vince McMahon's WWF, based right outside of New York. Moving the company offices from Charlotte to Dallas, and moving Starrcade from Greensboro & Atlanta (the prior two years were dual events closed-circuited with half the matches in each city, alternating back-and-forth), to Chicago was part of that strategy.

But the big story of that night was not Crockett taking Starrcade from Greensboro, killing the Thanksgiving tradition his father had started 26 years earlier. It was Vince McMahon creating the Survivor Series to run on PPV from Cleveland that same night to prevent Crockett from a successful debut. In those days, PPV events were rare, and most systems only had one channel, so you couldn't run two PPVs at the same time. The key was, McMahon was a proven success on PPV, coming off WrestleMania III, which was a huge success, doing in excess of 400,000 buys at a time when there were only about 5 million addressable homes. Knowing who had the leverage, Crockett agreed to move his show to the afternoon, which negated the whole key of why Thanksgiving worked. The afternoon was when families were

together and not a time for live events. There was fear that in Chicago, with no wrestling tradition on that day, and an afternoon show, which seemed to be a bad idea given that's when families get together, there was fear the live event could be an embarrassment. But that turned out not to be an issue, as the UIC Pavilion only held 9,000 fans, and actually sold out two weeks ahead of time.

Cable companies, short on PPV product, were thrilled, looking at marketing the two events together as a package deal, Starrcade in the afternoon, and Survivor Series at night. McMahon, realizing that what he just did may have benefitted him as the greater awareness would have helped both sides, did not run a show to also benefit his competitor. He told the cable companies that they would have to pick one show or the other, knowing he had all the leverage as a proven PPV winner. To make it more emphatic, he said that any company that aired Starrcade would not be allowed to have WrestleMania on PPV in 1988. Only five cable companies bucked the system—four in the Carolinas where Starrcade was expected to do more business, and one in San Jose, CA, where the company said they had made a verbal deal with Crockett, and unlike every other company in the country, their word was their bond, and, despite WWF being the home promotion and them admitting they were making a decision that would cost them business. But they said they weren't going to be strong-armed. Despite the threats, all five companies were allowed to air WrestleMania the next year.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 26, 1987

The most important Thanksgiving night in history

First Survivor Series - Richfield, Coliseum

Jim Duggan & Randy Savage & Ricky Steamboat & Brutus Beefcake & Jake Roberts b Harley Race & Hercules & Honky Tonk Man & Danny Davis & Ron Bass 24:00 **1/4

Velvet McIntyre & Itsuki Yamazaki & Noriyo Tateno & Rockin Robin & Fabulous Moolah b Leilani Kai & Judy Martin & Dawn Marie (not the later WWE/ECW valet) & Donna Christanello & Sensational Sherri Martel 20:00 **

Brian Blair & Jim Brunzell & Jim Powers & Paul Roma & Tito Santana & Rick Martel & Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith & Jacques Rougeau Jr. & Raymond Rougeau b Greg Valentine & Dino Bravo & Demolition Ax & Smash & Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart & Haku & Tama & Nikolai Volkoff & Boris Zhukov 37:00 ****

Andre the Giant & One Man Gang & King Kong Bundy & Butch Reed & Rick Rude b Hulk Hogan & Bam Bam Bigelow & Paul Orndorff & Don Muraco & Ken Patera 22:00 ***3/4

Attendance: 21,000 sellout

PPV buys: 350,000

Starrcade 87 Chitown Heat - UIC Pavilion - Final Starrcade on Thanksgiving

Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin & Sting d Rick Steiner & Larry Zbyszko & Eddie Gilbert 15:00 **3/4

Steve Williams b Barry Windham to retain the UWF title 7:00 DUD

Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson b Stan Lane & Bobby Eaton in a scaffold match 9:35 ***

Nikita Koloff b Terry Taylor to unify the NWA & UWF TV titles 18:20 *

Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson retained the NWA tag team titles losing via DQ to the Road Warriors 14:00 ***½

Dusty Rhodes b Lex Luger to win the U.S. title 16:00 *

Ric Flair b Ronnie Garvin to win the NWA world title in a cage match 17:25 **½

Attendance: 9,000 sellout

Closed-circuit attendance: 41,000

PPV buys: 16,500

Crockett had signed his top talent to lucrative contracts, and spent heavily, including using private planes to transport his top talent to shows—and on vacations and to party after shows in Las Vegas. He was counting on the idea of doing four PPV shows per year with an expanding PPV universe that would bring in millions of revenue with each show. Not getting the expected PPV revenue from Starrcade caused him to fall behind in his contract payments and run deeply in the red. Realistically, the McMahon move cost Crockett \$2 million, or possibly a little more. While he eventually was \$5 million in the red in early 1988 before feeling forced to sell, the \$2 million may have given him some breathing room and hope. And the ability to generate that money, and hope that larger numbers would follow and more people had PPV capability, for four similar events per year, could have given at least degree of hope of turning that red into black. But after McMahon was able to sabotage his first and second PPV shows by pressuring systems not to carry them, Crockett had to go to Turner Broadcasting, a powerhouse in cable, for the muscle to get all the cable systems his third PPV show. But in doing so, Turner Broadcasting became a partner, garnering a sizeable percentage of the PPV revenue. But even if the day had gone as expected, Crockett would have faced serious problems in continuing because he financially wouldn't be able to compete with McMahon's ability to do bigger PPV events and draw more fans at the live shows.

Fortunately for the competitive balance of the industry, Turner Broadcasting wanted to maintain the programming as wrestling was among the most popular shows on TBS, and at times the most popular show on the station, since it went from being a local UHF channel in Atlanta to becoming the first major satellite station in 1976. In November 1988, Turner Broadcasting purchased a majority interest in Jim Crockett Promotions, creating the company that would be known as World Championship Wrestling for \$9 million. While some members of the family, most notably David Crockett, were against the sale, thinking it was a cyclical business that would turn around, Jim Crockett Jr. felt that the losses were going to threaten their mother's retirement account that their father worked his life to build up, and that was the one thing they couldn't risk. Eventually, Turner Broadcasting purchased the remainder of the stock from Crockett Jr., who when selling, expected that he would be kept on to run the company, which didn't happen. Vince's move, attempting to keep Crockett out of PPV and eliminate him as competition, backfired. His rival operation, instead of being run by a family out of Charlotte that had overspent in order to compete, was run by a major media corporation with far deeper pockets than McMahon had, and led to McMahon having to fight for his life a decade later, although eventually the constant mismanagement of the promotion ended up its undoing despite its advantages of being owned by such a major corporation.

Of course, the benefit of hindsight also showed that the new company didn't have the understanding of the industry that Crockett had, and wrestling on TBS, with the exception of the period from 1997 through the first quarter of 1999, could never match the level of popularity the Crockett brand brought to the table.

A lot of people don't remember it, but there was a show at the Greensboro Coliseum on Thanksgiving of 1987, an afternoon show featuring five forgettable live matches, headed by Ivan Koloff vs.

Mighty Wilbur, an aging Hiro Matsuda vs. Kevin Sullivan and a women's Battle Royal. The Chicago card followed on closed-circuit. Between the weak live matches and being in the afternoon, only 6,000 fans attended. The next year, Starrcade was moved to the day after Christmas, to Norfolk, and wrestling was held on the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend in Greensboro, so that Atlanta's Omni, which had its own tradition, could get Thanksgiving night.

The Minneapolis tradition began in 1960 with a four-match show at the St. Paul Auditorium, opening with Bob Rasmussen going to a draw with a young Pretty Boy Larry Hennig, Judy Glover & Annette Palmer beating Lorraine Johnson (the mother of Nickla "Baby Doll" Roberts and along with Penny Banner considered the best worker of the women wrestlers of that era) & Ella St. John, amateur great Joe Scarpello beat Aldo Boggi in the semifinal, and AWA champion Verne Gagne retained his title beating Gene Kiniski, before 10,661 fans. That show may have been the first example of Thanksgiving being a great night for wrestling as the crowd was far larger than for any wrestling show in the Twin Cities that year.

Cleveland also held a major event that night, drawing 10,105 fans to the Public Auditorium for top babyface Lord Athol Layton facing Duke Keomuka, and a battle of top heels with Sato Keomuka (Kinji Shibuya) facing Fritz Von Erich. That's notable since Von Erich years later, after the big Dallas office broke into different pieces meaning Corpus Christi was no longer the weekly Thursday town, would promote regularly on Thanksgiving.

For most of the 60s, Gagne and Jim Crockett Sr. seemed to be the only promoters who pushed the idea of Thanksgiving as a great night for wrestling. And it wasn't the case consistently immediately. A lot of promotions in the 60s and 70s ran shows, but they were not in the company's key arena as much as simply running their weekly Thursday down, like in cities like Jacksonville, Amarillo, Bakersfield, Corpus Christi, Kansas City, Indianapolis and Sacramento. Crowds were usually up from usual, often the biggest of the year in those cities, but the idea of running major shows on those dates was still largely relegated to Minneapolis and Greensboro.

Minneapolis had some big matches in the 60s. In 1962, it was the battle of The Crushers, with The Crusher (Reggie Lisowski) against Krusher Kowalski (Bert Smith, who played college football with Gagne and Leo Nomellini at the University of Minnesota), with the loser never being able to use the Crusher name again, won by Lisowski. Kowalski for the rest of his AWA career was known as Stan Kowalski, the Big K, although in the 70s he did use the name Krusher Kowalski at least once at the Cow Palace in San Francisco.

In 1963, Crusher beat Gagne to win the AWA title before 5,594 paid and 1,300 kids who were let in free that night.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 26, 1964

Minneapolis Auditorium:

Ivan Kalmikoff b George "Catalina" Drake

Bob Boyer d Eddie Sharkey 30:00

Mighty Igor b Klondike Bill

Larry Hennig & Harley Race b Rene Goulet & Reggie Parks

Mad Dog Vachon retained AWA title losing via DQ to Verne Gagne

Attendance: 9,109 sellout

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 28, 1985

In 1965, a near sellout of 8,116 saw Vachon retain the title beating Crusher via DQ. 1966 was a Battle Royal won by Killer Kowalski. 1967 was notable for the Twin Cities debut of one of the city's all-time most memorable performers, Indianapolis manager Bobby Heenan. Heenan managed Harley Race in the main event, as Race lost to Gagne, on a show that included Cowboy Bill Watts & Rock Rogowski (who later became famous as Ole Anderson—both of whom became promoters and bookers who pushed Thanksgiving as one of their key nights of the year) beating Mitsu Arakawa & Dr. Moto (later known as Tor Kamata), and Victor the Wrestling Bear beat Dr. X (Dick "Destroyer" Beyer) via DQ. In the 70s, the shows mostly drew average crowds of 5,000 to 6,000. It wasn't until 1977 when there was another Thanksgiving night sellout, for a gimmick match as Crusher teamed with long-time opening match job guy George "Scrap Iron" Gadaski, to beat Super Destroyer (Don "Spoiler" Jardine) & manager Lord Alfred Hayes, who had been harassing Gadaski.

The real glory days of Thanksgiving in the Twin Cities started with the Hulk Hogan era, in 1981, where 17,000 fans came to the St. Paul Civic Center for a Hogan vs. Jesse Ventura arm wrestling match as well as a Nick Bockwinkel AWA title defense against Sheik Adnan Al-Kaissie.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 25, 1982

St. Paul Civic Center

Lone Eagle & Tiny Tom b Little Tokyo & Hillbilly Pete in a midgits match

Tom Lintz b Kenny "Sodbuster" Jay

Steve Olsonoski d Bobby Duncum

Ken Patera b Baron Von Raschke

Jerry Blackwell & Sheik Adnan Al-Kaissie b Mad Dog Vachon & Jim Brunzell via DQ

Nick Bockwinkel no contest Rick Martel to retain the AWA title

Attendance: 18,000 sellout

The 1983 show did 13,163 with Bockwinkel over Vachon via DQ in an AWA title match, with Ray Stevens as referee. In 1984, they drew 16,000 with the Road Warriors against Blackwell & Boom Boom Bundy (King Kong Bundy) and Martel vs. Billy Robinson.

The peak of the Thanksgiving tradition in the Twin Cities was 1985, with the AWA and WWE running head-to-head. The AWA ran with The Road Warriors vs. Freebirds and a Battle Royal, drawing 14,300 fans to the St. Paul Civic Center. The same night, the WWF drew 15,000 to the Met Center in Minneapolis, with Hogan, managed by Mr. T, vs. Randy Savage, managed on that night only by Heenan. But after two shows did nearly 30,000 fans the year before, by 1986, the AWA was dead, as even on Thanksgiving they were down to 4,000 fans.

St. Paul Civic Center

Leon White (later to become Vader) d Bill Irwin

Mongolian Stomper b Kevin Kelly

Scott Hall b Boris Zhukov via DQ

Buck Zumhofe b Steve Regal (not the current WWE wrestler William Regal) to win AWA light heavyweight title

Jerry Blackwell b Michael Hayes

Road Warriors b Michael Hayes & Buddy Roberts

Scott Hall won Battle Royal

Attendance: 14,300

Minneapolis Met Center

Prelim results unavailable

Uncle Elmer b Jesse Ventura via DQ

Paul Orndorff b Roddy Piper via DQ

Hulk Hogan (managed by Mr. T) b Randy Savage (managed by Bobby Heenan) to retain WWF title

Attendance: 15,000

The final Thanksgiving event was in 1987 before 1,800 fans at the Minneapolis Auditorium, headlined by Curt Hennig defending the AWA title against Greg Gagne. The finish saw Larry Hennig try to interfere, when Verne Gagne, 61, with the idea of building for another comeback match, cleaned house on Larry Hennig, and then knocked out Curt with a roll of coins to apparently give Greg the championship. Like the people who left Starrcade '85 thinking they had seen the title change hands, when they watched television a few days later they were told that due to the outside interference, the title change was rescinded. If you were a wrestling fan who lived in Minneapolis, on that day you had the chance to watch Starrcade on closed-circuit, Survivor Series on PPV, or see the local matches, and at that time for most fans the AWA was a distant third. In 1989, when WWE tried to revive the tradition with a show the night before Survivor Series, Hogan vs. Mr. Perfect Curt Hennig drew only 3,700.

Greensboro's Thanksgiving tradition continued as Jim Crockett Sr. would put in a bid to get the world champion to Greensboro for the traditional show. Lou Thesz defended in 1963 against Swede Hanson and 1965 against Pat O'Connor. Gene Kiniski then defended in 1966 against the Missouri Mauler and 1967 against Johnny Weaver. The Coliseum held 8,600 fans before its expansion in 1967, and 9,000 through 1972. The Thanksgiving shows in the 60s usually drew right near capacity.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 23, 1967

Greensboro Coliseum

Bulldog Lee Henning b Bob Nador

Rip Hawk & Swede Hanson b Rudy Kay & Les Thatcher

Haystacks Calhoun & Amazing Zuma b Missouri Mauler & Pampero Firpo

George & Sandy Scott & George Becker b The Infernos & J.C. Dykes

Gene Kiniski retained NWA world title going to a 60:00 draw with Johnny Weaver

Attendance: 9,017 sellout (turn away crowd, largest crowd for any event in the arena up to that point)

In 1968, they didn't get the world champion, and instead brought in Joe Louis, the boxing legend, to referee Weaver & George Becker vs. Lars & Gene Anderson, drawing a near sellout. The next year, Weaver & Becker vs. The Infernos, managed by J.C. Dykes, for the Atlantic Coast tag title also drew a near sellout.

During the 70s, there was a dual tradition, as Greensboro and Norfolk both had big shows.

1970 featured Dory Funk Jr. as world champion, going to a one hour draw with Jerry Brisco, drew only 5,968 fans. It was the first time Funk Jr. had ever appeared in Greensboro even though he had been champion for more than 18 months.

In 1971, they debuted a cage match, with Weaver & Bobby Kay (of the famed Cormier wrestling family) & Argentina Apollo vs. Missouri Mauler & Brute Bernard & Art Nelson with Louis as referee, which drew a sellout of 9,000 fans. Interestingly, they had Funk Jr. in the territory, but booked him at the Norfolk Arena that night against Jerry Brisco.

In 1972, after the Coliseum was expanded to 13,000 seats, a match with Jack & Jerry Brisco beating Dory Funk Jr. & Dory Funk Sr. in two of three falls set the territory's all-time attendance record, and also set the all-time attendance record for the arena for any event, and was the largest indoor sports crowd up to that point ever in the city, as well as the largest pro wrestling crowd in the history of the territory. To show how much things have changed, 9,500 of those tickets were sold the night of the show. Keep in mind that at this point in time, there were only 150,000 people living in the city.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 23, 1972

Greensboro Coliseum

Ronnie Garvin b Joe Soto

Randy Curtis b Billy Hines

Klondike Bill b Evil Eye Gordon (Guillotine Gordon aka Enforcer Luciano)

Gene Anderson b Les Thatcher

Sandy Scott d The Menace

Freddy Sweetan & Mike DuBois (later to become Alexis Smirnoff) b Jim Dillon (J.J. Dillon) & David Finlay (David Crockett)

Thunderbolt Patterson b Ole Anderson in a lumberjack match

Jack & Jerry Brisco b Dory Funk Jr. & Dory Funk Sr.

Attendance: 13,000 sellout (largest crowd in the history of the promotion and for any event in the history of the expanded Greensboro Coliseum)

In 1973, the show was billed as a memorial for Jim Crockett Sr., who had passed away at the age of 64 earlier that year. As part of honoring their father, the Crocketts brought in the classic match of the generation, with Jack Brisco defending the NWA title against Dory Funk Jr., with Thesz as guest referee, which drew 8,000 fans. The semifinal had Jerry Brisco defending the Eastern states title against Terry Funk.

In 1974, Jack Brisco retained the title via disqualification against Wahoo McDaniel by throwing him over the top rope before 11,268 fans in a match where Brisco played heel. Louis was brought in to referee a cage match with a battle of long-time tag partners, Rip Hawk vs. Swede Hanson. It was noted in local publicity that even though the attendance wasn't as high as 1972, the show did almost a duplicate of that show's record gate in excess of \$50,000.

The 1975 show had Brisco defending against McDaniel in a no DQ match, losing via count out, while U.S. champion Terry Funk dropped the title to Paul Jones before 12,102 fans. Mid Atlantic had head-to-head competition from the rival IWA running in Winston-Salem that night with Mil Mascaras vs. Bulldog Brower. Mid Atlantic also ran at the Scope Arena in Norfolk the same night with an Andre the Giant vs. Superstar Billy Graham arm-wrestling match and Andre & Ken Patera & Rufus Jones vs. Graham & Ole & Gene Anderson.

In 1976, Greensboro featured a two-ring 24 man Battle Royal built around Andre, Haystacks Calhoun, McDaniel, Blackjack Mulligan, Dusty Rhodes, Missouri Mauler, Ric Flair, Superstar Graham, Chris Taylor, Patera, Greg Valentine, Dino Bravo, Angelo Mosca and Jerry Blackwell ending when McDaniel pinned Mulligan before 11,063 fans. Norfolk ran the same night with Terry Funk as world champion defending against Paul Jones.

In 1977, Greensboro again ran the two-ring Battle Royal, won by Mulligan, again featuring Andre, and a Valentine vs. McDaniel match. World champion Harley Race went to Norfolk to defend against Ricky Steamboat.

In 1978, a Flair vs. Mulligan cage match broke the area's attendance record with 13,447, while Race wrestled Paul Jones in Norfolk in the world title match. Even though some shows drew better, within Greensboro, with the exception of the Starrcade shows, the Flair-Mulligan blow-off in the cage after the two split up their tag team is probably the most remembered of the Thanksgiving matches.

When Flair does sports talk shows these days in the Carolinas, the fans in the area rarely talk about anything after 1986, and the Flair-Mulligan feud to this day remains a topic he's constantly asked about.

In 1979, Andre winning a Battle Royal plus Jimmy Snuka vs. Tim "Mr. Wrestling" Woods for the U.S. title and a Mulligan vs. John Studd street fight drew 11,387 fans. The same night in Norfolk, Flair vs. Buddy Rogers and Steamboat & Youngblood vs. Jones & Baron Von Raschke drew 10,000 more.

In 1980, a double main event of a cage match with Snuka & Ray Stevens losing to Jones & Masked Superstar with the titles vs. Superstar's mask, plus Stevens & Snuka having to hand out \$1,000 to the fans if they lost, co-headlined with a Flair vs. Valentine cage match for the U.S. title, which drew 12,000 fans.

In 1981, a cage match with Flair, now as world champion, beating Ole Anderson in a cage match set the record with a sellout 15,136 fans.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 25, 1982

Greensboro Coliseum - This time the Carolinas guy is the defending world champion against the outsider

Mike Davis b Masa Fuchi

Bob Orton Jr. b Private Jim Nelson (later to become Boris Zhukov)

Johnny Weaver b Ken Timbs

Frank Monte b Ron Ritchie

Bad Leroy Brown won 20 man Battle Royal to become Mid Atlantic TV champion

Abdullah the Butcher & Jimmy Valiant b Jos LeDuc & Sir Oliver Humperdink in a cage match

Jack Brisco b U.S. champion Greg Valentine in a non-title match 23:00

Ric Flair b Roddy Piper via DQ to retain world title in 24:00

Attendance: 15,498 sellout

The second Starrcade, in 1984, was built around the \$1 million challenge. Jim Crockett Jr. was shown going to the bank and withdrawing \$1 million, with the idea the winner of Flair vs. Rhodes for the world title would get the money, and borrowing what his father did with Joe Louis, he brought in Joe Frazier as referee. The show drew an advanced sellout of 15,821 live and another 26,000 on closed circuit around the territory, ending when Frazier stopped the match because Rhodes was bleeding. The idea was to build to a Rhodes vs. Frazier match, but that never materialized.

Things got even bigger in 1985. Crockett Jr. that year had bought the TBS time slot contract from Vince McMahon for a real \$1 million, as opposed to the money Flair got. Atlanta's Omni by that point had its own long Thanksgiving tradition, so the idea was "Starrcade '85: The Gathering," with half the show in Greensboro and the other half in Atlanta. This was the first Thanksgiving event promoted on a national basis, as the first two Starrcades were really just promoted within the territory. Rhodes pinned Flair in the main event to apparently win the title, and people left the arena believing they had seen a title change. However, on television that Saturday, it was announced that due to outside interference coming before Rhodes pinned Flair, that the correct result should have been a DQ, and Flair retaining. This led to a lucrative series of rematches throughout the U.S. That show was also notable for the Magnum T.A. vs. Tully Blanchard I Quit match, one of the most famous I Quit matches in history and a match recently voted on an Observer on-line poll as the greatest Thanksgiving match of all-time.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 28, 1985

Starrcade '85 The Gathering

Greensboro Coliseum

Don Kernodle b Tommy Lane

Denny Brown b Rocky King to retain NWA jr. heavyweight title

Krusher Khrushchev (Barry Darsow/Demolition Smash) b Sam Houston to win vacant Mid Atlantic title

Ron Bass b Black Bart in a bullrope match

J.J. Dillon b Ron Bass in a bullrope match

Buddy Landel b Terry Taylor to win National heavyweight title

Magnum T.A. b Tully Blanchard in an I Quit match to win U.S. title

Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson b Ivan & Nikita Koloff to win NWA world tag team title

Attendance: 16,000 sellout

Atlanta Omni

Thunderfoot (Joel Deaton) b Italian Stallion

Pez Whatley b Mike Graham

Manny Fernandez b Abdullah the Butcher in a strap match

Jimmy Valiant & Miss Atlanta Lively (Ron Garvin in drag) b Dennis Condrey & Bobby Eaton in a street fight

Superstar Billy Graham b The Barbarian via DQ in an arm wrestling match

Ole & Arn Anderson b Wahoo McDaniel & Billy Jack Haynes

Ric Flair retained NWA world title losing via DQ to Dusty Rhodes

Attendance: 14,000

Closed-circuit attendance: 31,000

In 1986, "The Night of the Skywalkers," built around the Road Warriors vs. Midnight Express scaffold match, as well as Flair defending against Nikita Koloff and Rhodes vs. Tully Blanchard in a first blood match, drew another sellout in Greensboro and the Annex of more than 19,000, plus 14,900 at the Omni and 29,000 more on closed-circuit with a total gross of more than \$1 million, the only non-WWF/WWE show in that era to ever hit that mark when it comes to tickets sold. The tradition of wrestling on Thanksgiving in Greensboro had never been stronger. And nobody in the Coliseum that night could have had a clue that it would be the last time wrestling was held in that arena on Thanksgiving night.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 27, 1986

Starrcade '86: The Night of the Skywalkers/The Super Bowl of Wrestling

Greensboro Coliseum

Tim Horner & Nelson Royal b Don & Rocky Kernodle 7:30 ***

Baron Von Raschke & Hector Guerrero b Shaska Whatley & The Barbarian 7:25 **½

Wahoo McDaniel b Rick Rude in an Indian strap match 9:05 *

Jimmy Valiant b Paul Jones with Valiant's wife's hair up against Jones' hair 4:00 *1/4

Tully Blanchard b Dusty Rhodes to win the NWA TV title in a first blood match 7:30 *1/2

Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson b Ole & Arn Anderson to retain the NWA world tag team titles in a cage match 20:20 ****1/4

Attendance: 16,000 sellout plus 3,500 closed-circuit next door

Atlanta Omni

Brad Armstrong d Jimmy Garvin 15:00 *1/2

Ivan Koloff & Krusher Khrushchev b Dutch Mantell & Bobby Jagers to retain the U.S. tag team titles in a no DQ match 9:10 ***1/4

Sam Houston b Bill Dundee via DQ to retain the Central States heavyweight title ***1/4

Big Bubba Rogers (Big Bossman) b Ronnie Garvin in a Louisville Street fight 11:50 ***3/4

Road Warriors b Dennis Condrey & Bobby Eaton in a scaffold match 7:00 ***½

Ric Flair b Nikita Koloff via DQ to retain the NWA world title 20:00 ****

Attendance: 14,900

Closed-circuit attendance: 29,000

They continued to run Thanksgiving weekend in Greensboro, and by 1990, with a show headlined by Ron Simmons pinning Ric Flair in a cage match (it was scheduled as Doom vs. Flair & Arn Anderson for the tag titles in a cage), they were down to 700 people.

Atlanta's Thanksgiving tradition at the Omni dated back to 1975. Even when business in the city was bad, the Thanksgiving show almost always drew well. Thanksgiving in Atlanta in that era included lighting of the Christmas tree lights downtown at sundown, which saw hundreds of thousands of people out. So people were already out, and Barnett would put on often his most loaded up show of the year. For several years, Thanksgiving would feature a traditional tag team tournament, as they would always have some sort of controversy leading to the titles being vacated.

Unlike the other cities, which would base their shows around one strong main event, Atlanta, like the later Starrcades, was about a complete loaded show.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 27, 1975

Atlanta Omni's first Thanksgiving show

Crazy Luke Graham d Dean Ho

Tony Charles b Ronnie Garvin

Jerry Brisco & Bob Backlund b Dick Slater & Bob Orton Jr.

Lonnie "Moondog" Mayne b Chief Bold Eagle

Chief Jay Strongbow b Brute Bernard

Ernie Ladd & Bobo Brazil b Harley Race & Ox Baker

The Spoiler (Don Jardine, managed by Gary Hart) b Mr. Wrestling II in a mask vs. title match to win the Georgia heavyweight title

Abdullah the Butcher b The Sheik (managed by Eddie Creachman) in a cage match with no referee

Attendance: 13,000

In 1976, Ole & Gene Anderson beating Mr. Wrestling I & II to retain the NWA tag titles, plus The Sheik over Mighty Igor via count out and Thunderbolt Patterson over Georgia champ Dick Slater via count out drew 11,300.

In 1977, with Tony Atlas over Abdullah the Butcher, Ernie Ladd & Thunderbolt Patterson over The Sheik & Pak Song and Dick Slater & Mr. Wrestling II over Stan Hansen & Ole Anderson, they drew 11,000.

In 1978, the first of the traditional Thanksgiving tag team tournaments drew a sellout of 16,500.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 23, 1978

Atlanta Omni - The first tag team tournament

Rick Martel & Tommy Rich b The Islanders (Afa & Sika Anoa'i)

The Assassin (Jody Hamilton) & The Superstar (Bill Eadie) b Bugsy McGraw & Rufus R. Jones via DQ

Jack & Jerry Brisco b Pak Song & Angelo "King Kong" Mosca

Dory Funk Jr. & Terry Funk b Haystacks Calhoun & Klondike Bill

Ernie Ladd & Stan Hansen b Mr. Wrestling I (Tim Woods) & Mr. Wrestling II (Johnny Walker)

Dory Funk Jr. & Terry Funk b Rick Martel & Tommy Rich

Jack & Jerry Brisco b The Assassin & The Superstar

Dusty Rhodes & Dick Slater b Ernie Ladd & Stan Hansen

Dory Funk Jr. & Terry Funk b Dusty Rhodes & Dick Slater

Thunderbolt Patterson b Ole Anderson

Dory Funk Jr. & Terry Funk b Jack & Jerry Brisco to win the Georgia tag team championship

Attendance: 16,500 sellout

The second tag team tournament in 1979 drew 12,000, which also included Rich over Bobby Heenan in a loser leaves town match, a lights out match with babyface Ole Anderson & Thunderbolt Patterson beating Ladd & mystery partner (Anderson's former tag partner Ivan Koloff), and Mr. Wrestling II no contest with the fake Mr. Wrestling II. Austin Idol & Superstar beat the Briscos in the finals of the tag team tournament which also featured Hansen & McDaniel, Atlas & Ray Candy, Ox Baker & Killer Khan and Rhodes & Wrestling II.

In 1980, they drew another sellout of 16,000 plus with Race going to a no contest with Atlas and The Freebird team of Terry Gordy & Buddy Roberts winning the tournament beating Robert Fuller & Plowboy Frazier. Other teams included Afa & Sika, Ole & Gene Anderson, Idol & Kevin Sullivan, Jack & Jerry Brisco and Terry Taylor & Steve Keirn. They also pushed a women's lib match which was unique for its time as Joyce Grable & Judy Martin, the world women's tag team champions, demanded to be in the tournament. They worked an interesting, believable match with the babyface team of Steve Olsonoski & Jerry Roberts (Jacques Rougeau Jr.), where the faces were cautious, didn't attack, got slapped around, but quickly came back to win.

In 1981, the talent went way down, drawing 10,000 with Bob & Brad Armstrong over Mr Saito & Mr. Fuji and Superstar winning the National title in a Texas death match over Rich. The tournament was loaded with no-shows of major advertised teams included three of pro wrestling's most legendary duos, Ole & Gene Anderson, Jack & Jerry Brisco and Pat Patterson (scheduled to team with most famous partner Ray Stevens, who instead teamed with Scott Irwin).

In 1982, business was even lower, and the talent level had gotten bad. The Moondogs won the tournament over Tommy & Johnny Rich. In 1983, a crowd of 12,000 saw Butch Reed & Pez Whatley win the tournament over the unique team of Randy Savage & Magnum T.A., on a show headlined by long-time rivals Tommy Rich & Buzz Sawyer over the Road Warriors in a non-tournament match.

The tradition continued in 1984, but by this point Vince McMahon purchased Georgia Championship Wrestling. With the purchase, he got the already booked Thanksgiving date. Ole Anderson started up opposition and ran the Omni on the Sunday before Thanksgiving with the tag team tournament, with Bill & Scott Irwin beating Brad Armstrong & Jacques Rougeau in the finals. The talent was way down from prior years, with the Road Warriors and Jerry Lawler & Jimmy Valiant the only name teams. WWE ran on Thanksgiving with a Battle Royal won by Paul Orndorff and Sgt. Slaughter vs. Nikolai Volkoff, but in the 80s, the WWE brand wasn't clicking in Atlanta. Even with all those people downtown, they only drew 4,800 fans to the show.

The Omni tradition ended as far as the show on Thanksgiving night being a big deal in town ended in 1986. There was no show at the Omni in 1987, but Crockett brought it back in 1988, drawing 8,000 with Sting & Lex Luger no contest with the Road Warriors and Rhodes & Bam Bam Bigelow over Flair & Barry Windham via DQ. In 1989, they ran with Flair over Great Muta via DQ, drawing 7,500. They drew 6,500 in 1990 with Sting over Sid Vicious, Doom (Butch Reed & Ron Simmons) over Flair & Arn Anderson in an elimination match and

Steiners over Nasty Boys in a cage match. In 1991, after Flair had left for WWF, it was down to 3,800 for Luger vs. Rick Steiner for the WCW title and Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes vs. Arn Anderson & Bobby Eaton 45:00 draw for the tag titles. The final Thanksgiving show was in 1992, drawing 5,715 for Simmons & Sting & Van Hammer & Dustin Rhodes over Windham & Rick Rude & Vader & Cactus Jack cage match.

The Dallas tradition was actually rather short, but still was memorable. Dallas had run Thanksgiving shows at the Sportatorium, but moved to Reunion Arena in 1983, drawing a sellout of 18,500 fans for the Kerry Von Erich vs. Michael Hayes loser leaves town cage match. In one of the most heated matches I ever saw live, a short match with a great finish including Buddy Roberts on the top of the cage, and Fritz Von Erich shaking the cage, causing Roberts to crotch himself, and Fritz slamming the cage door on Hayes' head (as retribution for the angle that started the Freebirds vs. Von Erichs feud when Terry Gordy slammed the cage door on Kerry Von Erich's head when Von Erich was facing Ric Flair in a world title match). Hayes did end up returning in late January, with the storyline that The Freebirds had cheated to win the World six-man tag team titles in Atlanta over the Von Erichs (no such match took place), and the Von Erichs, in order to get a rematch for the titles in Texas, had to let Hayes return. What made this hard in Dallas is that the world champion was always in the Carolinas, and that meant they had to run a major show without a world title match on top.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 24, 1983

Dallas Reunion Arena

Johnny Mantell & Mike Reed & Jose Lothario b Boris Zurkov (later to become Zhukov) & Black Gordman & Tonga John (later to become The Barbarian)

The Missing Link (Dewey Robertson) b Buddy Roberts

Kevin Von Erich b Terry Gordy

David Von Erich b Kimala via DQ to retain the Texas title

Mike Von Erich (Dallas area debut, billed as first pro match but actually he had debuted a week earlier in San Antonio) b Skandor Akbar

Super Destroyers (Bill & Scott Irwin) retained American tag team titles going to a double disqualification with Junkyard Dog & Iceman King Parsons

Chris Adams (managed by Sunshine) b Jimmy Garvin (managed by Precious) to win the American heavyweight title

Kerry Von Erich b Michael Hayes in a loser leaves town cage match

Attendance: 18,500 sellout - thousands turned away

In 1984, they drew 15,325 with Chris Adams over Kevin Von Erich and Terry Gordy over Killer Khan in a death match with Kerry Von Erich as referee. In 1985, they drew 12,000 with Gino Hernandez & Adams over Kevin & Kerry in a cage match to win the American tag titles. In 1986, they were down to 6,000 for Fritz Von Erich, at the age of 57, beating Abdullah the Butcher via DQ. In 1987, before 7,000, Kerry Von Erich beat Al Perez the last time they ran a major Thanksgiving event.

New Orleans ran Thanksgiving shows in the early 70s at the St. Bernard's Civic Center, but it wasn't any kind of a big deal. But when Bill Watts opened up the Superdome, they started the holiday tradition

there. Watts was part owner of the Georgia office so was well aware of how it was always successful in Atlanta, and also worked for Gagne in the 60s and appeared on some of the Minneapolis Thanksgiving events. Thanksgiving was tough for Watts, because his quarterly Superdome shows used both the local crew and brought in the biggest names from around the country to make the events seem special. But on Thanksgiving, it was very difficult to get the top outside talent, particularly when Starrcade and the World Class shows came around, plus with All Japan and New Japan both running their tag team tournaments at that time of the year, that also removed a lot of the biggest stars from the equation.

The first Superdome Thanksgiving show was in 1980, drawing 18,000 fans with Ladd over Orndorff in a lights out match, The Grappler over Killer Karl Kox to keep the North American title, Junkyard Dog & Bill Watts over Ladd & Leroy Brown and Dusty Rhodes over Ivan Koloff.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 26, 1981

New Orleans Superdome

Terry Orndorff b Don Serrano

Jerry Novak b Tony Charles

Ed Wiskoski (later Col. DeBeers) b Jimmy Garvin

Frank Monte & Barbie Doll b Rick Ferrara & Diamond Lil (mixed male and midget woman teams)

Iron Sheik b King Cobra

Ernie Ladd b Kerry Von Erich via count out

Dusty Rhodes b Great Kabuki

Ted DiBiase b Bob Roop to retain the North American title 23:00

Junkyard Dog & Mike George b Paul Orndorff & Bob Orton Jr. to retain the Mid South tag team titles 46:00

Attendance: 18,000

The 1982 show drew 15,000 as Stagger Lee, who was JYD under a mask, beat DiBiase to win the North American title. They didn't even run in 1983, going the week before Thanksgiving because of so much top talent working Dallas and Greensboro, and were down to 8,000 fans with JYD over Butch Reed, Rhodes no contest Volkoff, Road Warriors over Wrestling II & Magnum T.A. and David Von Erich over Kimala via count out. The 1984 show drew 14,000 with Rock & Roll Express over Midnight Express in a scaffold match and Magnum over Ernie Ladd via DQ in a North American title match. In 1985 they drew about 10,000 for a closed-circuit of Starrcade. It was kind of an ugly scene as even though the TV hammered home it would be a closed circuit show, when the fans got to the arena, a lot of them were furious thinking all the stars would be there live. The final show was in 1986, where they drew 13,000, but that was with cutting ticket prices way down as the company was having trouble drawing by this time. In early 1987, the promotion, falling deeply in debt due to a combination of a local collapse of the oil industry and a failed national expansion, was sold to Jim Crockett promotions. The show featured two cage matches going on at the same time, with Steve Williams vs. Michael Hayes and Terry Taylor vs. Buddy Roberts, and the winner of the cage match that ends the quickest was allowed to join his partner in the other cage to make it a handicap match.

The final Thanksgiving tradition was the best known nationally, the Survivor Series, which debuted on Thanksgiving night of 1987, and still exists 23 years later. The show was originally built around ten man elimination tag matches, with the debut event selling out the Richfield Coliseum just outside Cleveland with 21,000 fans. The original main event was Andre & One Man Gang & Reed & Rude & Bundy over Hogan & Orndorff & Don Muraco & Patera & Bigelow.

The 1988 version saw attendance fall to 13,500 in Cleveland, with a main event of Hogan & Savage & Hercules & Koko Ware & Hillbilly Jim over DiBiase & Big Bossman & Akeem (One Man Gang) & Red Rooster (Terry Taylor) & Haku. Because the crowd was so far down, it was moved from Cleveland the next year.

In 1989, in Chicago, they drew 15,294, with Hogan & Jake Roberts & Demolition over DiBiase & Zeus & Warlord & Barbarian.

THANKSGIVING FLASHBACK - November 22, 1990

Hartford Civic Center - Survivor Series - The Final Curtain

Ultimate Warrior & Legion of Doom (Road Warriors) & Kerry Von Erich b Mr. Perfect (Curt Hennig) & Demolition (Ax & Smash & Crush) 14:19 **1/2

Ted DiBiase & The Undertaker (WWE big show debut) & Greg Valentine & Honky Tonk Man b Dusty Rhodes & Koko B. Ware & Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart 13:59 ***1/2

Rick Martel & The Warlord & Paul Roma & Hercules b Jake Roberts & Jimmy Snuka & Shawn Michaels & Marty Jannetty 18:06 ***1/4

Hulk Hogan & Jim Duggan & Tugboat (Fred Ottman) & Big Bossman b Earthquake (John Tenta) & Dino Bravo & Haku & The Barbarian 14:50 **

Nikolai Volkoff & Tito Santana & The Bushwhackers (Luke Williams & Butch Miller) b Sgt. Slaughter & Boris Zhukov & Pat Tanaka & Akio Sato 10:37 *

Hulk Hogan & Ultimate Warrior & Tito Santana (all surviving babyfaces from previous elimination matches) b Ted DiBiase & Rick Martel & Hercules & Paul Roma & Warlord (all surviving heels from previous elimination matches) 9:08 *1/2

Attendance: 13,000

PPV buys: 380,000

The last true major Thanksgiving show was in 1990, at the Hartford Civic Center. The WWE Survivor Series drew 13,000 paid (2,000 shy of capacity) and \$216,000. The main event of Hogan & Warrior & Tito Santana won a three-on-five handicap match over DiBiase & Martel & Warlord & Hercules & Paul Roma in just 9:08, winning five falls to one, in a battle of the survivors of a series of elimination matches underneath, was anti-climactic and a poor main event overall, and the last time they did a show with that format. The show drew what at the time was considered disappointing numbers on pay-per-view, leading to the mentality that Thanksgiving was a good night to get people to go out and see live matches or go to the movies, but it wasn't a great night to get them to stay home and watch on television.

In 1991, Survivor Series was moved to Thanksgiving Eve, which actually worked out a lot worse. It was later moved again, and now

takes place on a Sunday in mid-November, and stays away from the Thanksgiving weekend.

Thanks to help from files from James Zordani, Matt Farmer, Mid Atlantic Gateway and Wrestling Observer historical files